

COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

New union contract at Multnomah County

AFSCME Local 88's new contract keeps up with inflation and attempts to address racial equity

AFSCME Local 88 and Multnomah County reached tentative agreement Jan. 12 on a new three-year union contract covering 3,300 County workers. The agreement provides raises to keep up with inflation, maintains the status quo on health insurance, and includes measures to foster greater work-life balance and racial equity.

"We think it's a very good agreement," said union chief negotiator Eben Pullman.

- Raises:** Workers will get immediate cost-of-living raises equal to \$0.60/hour or 2.2 percent, whichever is greater. About two-thirds of members — those who make less than \$27.34 an hour — will get the \$0.60 raises. The raises are retroactive to the July 1, 2017, when the previous contract expired. Workers will also get inflation-based raises of 1 to 4 percent on July 1 of 2018 and 2019.
- Work-life balance:** The new contract makes it easier to get alternative work schedules besides the customary 9 to 5 weekdays. And once granted, alternative schedules can't be taken away unless for performance reasons, and workers have to first be given an opportunity to improve. The contract also for the first time has provisions for some workers to request

telecommuting. Alternative work schedules have proved popular for some workers because they make it easier to drop off or pick up kids from school or daycare, or avoid commuting at rush hour.

- Workplace equity.** The new contract says the County and the union won't tolerate any form of "micro-aggression," which is defined as "commonplace and casual verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities and denigration, often unintentional or unconscious, that repeat or reaffirm stereotypes and convey negative or derogatory messages based on the recipient's status in a racial minority or other non-dominant culture group." The County will report all microaggression complaints raised by union members to Local 88, and will make a mediator available to any employee who wants to address their relationship with the individual alleged to have engaged in the prohibited conduct, though participation would require the consent of both parties.

The new contract contains several other provisions aimed at "equity." It encourages participation of staff from diverse backgrounds on hiring panels, and stipulates that members can be paid release time to participate. For a renewable one-year trial period, it broadens sick and bereavement leave to include care for any individual whose close association with the employee is the equivalent of a

family relationship. And for the first time, workers who are certified to have a cultural competence will get a 4 percent pay differential.

"For me, equity is about not leaving anyone behind," said Local 88 Vice President Raymond De Silva. De Silva chairs the County's Employees of Color Resource Group, and served on the union bargaining team.

The bargaining unit covers nearly all non-management employees at the County library and all county agencies except corrections and sheriffs officers and the district attorney's office.

When bargaining began last May, the union came with full proposals. The County backed off a proposal to require workers to participate in a health risk assessment, but held firm to a \$15 starting wage for some new hires. The roughly 40 employees, such as library assistants, who currently earn \$15 will go to \$15.29, the next step in the wage scale, but new hires will continue to start at \$15, the same starting wage as the previous contract.

Members were scheduled to vote on the agreement Jan. 19 through 30. This issue went to press before results were announced.

WASHINGTON

Hanford workers will get workers' comp for cancers under new law

Washington lawmakers passed legislation late last month that will allow workers at the Hanford Nuclear Reservation to have better access to workers' compensation benefits.

HB 1723 passed the House 76-22, and got through the Senate 35-14. It is now headed to the governor's desk, where he is expected to sign in. Last session, a similar bill was killed by Senate Republican leaders who controlled that body. Democrats are in control this session.

Workers at Hanford are exposed to some of the most hazardous substances known to man, including many chemical and radiological hazards that are as yet unidentified, and the safety measures intended to protect

them are inadequate. Despite this, when Hanford workers get sick they lacked the same workers' compensation safety net that other sick/injured workers have because the burden of proof is on the worker to connect specific exposures to their disease — a virtually impossible task given the circumstances at Hanford.

The new law recommends that Hanford workers' illnesses be presumed to be work-related when they see workers' compensation coverage. This presumption is similar to one that already exists for firefighters, who are similarly exposed to toxic chemicals and vapors in their line of work.

HB 1723 was sponsored by Rep. Larry Halder (R-Richland). Sen. Karen Keiser (D-Kent) sponsored the Senate companion bill.

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